



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SDDVA PARTICIPATES IN OUTREACH PROGRAMS

SDDVA Program Manager Erin Bultje represented the Department at the VA Veterans Town Hall in Sioux Falls last week. She was on hand to hear the reports from the VA, as well as update veterans on benefits and services.

SDDVA Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson attended the Yellow Ribbon and Welcome Home Ceremony for the 114th Fighter Wing and their dependents in Sioux Falls this past weekend.

A total of 335 men and women with the South Dakota Air National Guard were welcomed home. The 114th Fighter Wing was deployed for four months to locations like Afghanistan, Qatar and Germany. Distinguished guests included Governor Kristie Noem, Senator John Thune, Senator Mike Rounds, Congressman Dusty Johnson, Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken, and Adjutant General Tim Reisch. SDDVA, the VA, and numerous private organizations offering services and support to veterans had booths set up for the event.

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# VIETNAM VETERAN BOOK

*"Vietnam Veterans: Still Coming Home"* tells the stories of 31 Vietnam Veterans who served "in country" between 1961 and 1974. Within the pages of this unique book, veterans from each branch of service share their stories about their lives before, during, and after Vietnam.

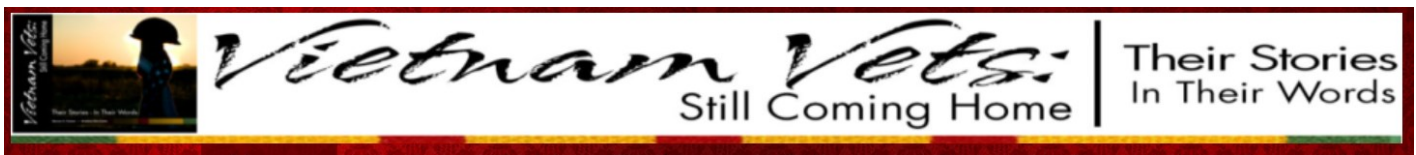
These are the stories of ordinary men and women who went to war in Vietnam, some enlisted, some were career military, and others were drafted. For the first time, many of these veterans open up about their witness to heroism, sacrifice, loss, success, suffering, and even battlefield humor.

Experience the lives of these men and women before their military service, and during the life-changing events in Vietnam. Remember your own experiences as these veterans chronicle their tours, and as they struggle to go forward while *Still Coming Home*.

Honoring these brave men and women who participated in this project by reading their stories, will in a small way make you part of their life, and keep their legacy alive.

The book sells for \$59.95 + tax (where applicable), shipping, and handling. All proceeds will go to the Veteran Service Organizations. We encourage you to visit their website at:

<http://www.thevietnamvets.com/Order.html>



## VBA ANNOUNCES DISTRICT REALIGNMENT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) announced a geographic restructuring, from five districts to four, a change that will align regional offices and special missions more evenly.

The realignment closes the North Atlantic District Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and shifts states into more geographically similar areas. The District Office located in St. Louis, Missouri, will now be responsible for the newly realigned Northeast District.

"The VBA district realignment is part of our effort to modernize the organization and become more efficient," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This transition affects the management oversight and reporting structure for regional office directors, but will not affect day-to-day operations for employees or impact beneficiaries."

The realignment does not affect the daily operations of any regional office. After the restructuring, the four district offices will be:

- Northeast District: St. Louis
- Southeast District: Nashville, Tennessee
- Continental District: Denver, Colorado
- Pacific District: Phoenix, Arizona

More information on the VBA district structure is available at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp>.

# TWO NEW VA PARTNERSHIPS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently formalized two partnerships aimed at [preventing Veteran suicide](#).

Effective January, the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#) began collaborating with the VA to advance and improve the quality of life for veterans to prevent suicides. Through this partnership, the VA and AFSP have been exchanging research on suicide and prevention efforts. AFSP has also begun sharing VA suicide-prevention messaging.



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

Effective last November, the [National Shooting Sports Foundation \(NSSF\)](#) began working with the VA to develop a program that will empower communities to engage in safe firearm-storage practices. The program will include information to help communities create coalitions around promoting and sustaining firearm safety with an emphasis on service members, veterans and their families.



**NSSF®**

**The Firearms Industry Trade Association**

“We want all Americans to know that suicide is preventable,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “By working with local organizations and community partners, we’re confident that we can make a meaningful difference to reduce suicide among veterans.”

These innovative partnerships highlight the shared mission between the VA, nonprofit organizations and local communities to end suicide among those who have served or are currently serving.

Research shows there is no single cause for suicide: It is the outcome of multiple contributing factors and events. However, environmental factors, such as access to lethal means, increase the risk for suicide. Firearms are one of the most deadly and common methods for suicide among Americans — particularly for service members and veterans.

Veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat), or text to 838255.

# NATIONAL SALUTE TO VETERAN PATIENT WEEK

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that, as part of an effort to honor hospitalized veterans, it will mark National Salute to Veteran Patients from Feb. 10-16 by encouraging communities to seek out opportunities to volunteer at their local VA facilities.

“The VA values the contributions of our volunteers, donors and partners in helping us keep the nation’s promise to our veterans,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said. “These community resources confirm to America’s Veterans that we are a nation that cares and remembers their sacrifices every day.”

Last year, schools, community groups and youth organizations nationwide sent more than 288,000 valentines to VA medical centers, which were distributed to veteran patients at facilities across the country. Additionally, more than 9,000 volunteers and 1,400 community organizations contributed to events and activities recognizing hospitalized veterans.

More than 75,000 volunteers nationwide provide over 12 million volunteer hours serving veterans. These volunteers are a vital asset to the nation’s veterans and to VA.

For those wanting to volunteer and join the mission to honor the sacrifice and service of America's Veterans during the National Salute or any time of year, visit the nearest VA facility or contact VA Voluntary Service online at [www.volunteer.va.gov](http://www.volunteer.va.gov).

The purpose of the program is to:

- Pay tribute and express appreciation to veterans,
- Increase community awareness of the role of the VA medical center,
- Encourage citizens to visit hospitalized veterans and to become involved as volunteers.



# WALL STREET JOURNAL ENDORSES VA'S PROPOSED COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS STANDARDS

*The Wall Street Journal* endorsed the VA's [recently announced proposed access standards](#) for community care in an [editorial published today](#).

This represents the second high-profile endorsement of the standards this week, with four former VA secretaries underscoring their support on Monday.

Last week, the VA announced the proposed standards, which will provide veterans the choice to use community care at VA expense based on drive times to VA facilities and average wait times for primary and specialty care.

In its editorial, the *Journal* asked "one question is why anyone would oppose the plan," as it helps veterans get "health care faster and closer to home."

The *Journal* underscored that, "The competition will put pressure on the VA to reduce wait times, which will matter in the incentive to seek outside care."

The paper went on to address the [myth of VA privatization](#):

"Behind all this is a debate about 'privatizing' the VA... Integrating veterans into the private health system makes sense for them and everyone else...The VA is especially competent at certain types of care like trauma recovery, and that's what the VA hospitals and treatment centers could focus on...Yet if the VA is providing excellent care to veterans, competition won't matter."

Read the [full editorial here](#).

## GREAT RESOURCE

Check out this link— <http://veteransdata.info/>. The site provides information on the social, economic and housing characteristics of veterans in the United States. You can search the data on county, state and national levels.

**Veterans Data Central**  
Informing Strategies to Help Veterans

# FORMER VA SECRETARIES BACK VA'S PROPOSED COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS STANDARDS

In an [opinion editorial published by FOX News today](#), four former VA Secretaries who served under Presidents Bush and Obama strongly backed VA's proposed community care access standards that form a central part of the MISSION Act.

The VA [proposed the access standards last week](#), basing them on an analysis of best practices in both government and private sector health care systems.

In their op-ed, former secretaries Anthony Principi, Jim Nicholson, James Peake and Robert McDonald said that the proposed standards "will place veterans at the center of their health care decisions."

The former secretaries also pushed back strongly against [predictable and false claims](#) that the new standards amount to [privatization of the VA](#), writing that "Some critics insinuate these moves to empower veterans and spur the VA to be more customer-focused may somehow lead to the dismantling of the VA and to outsourcing all medical care for veterans to the private sector. This presumption discounts and disregards what is happening inside the VA today because of efforts begun during our time in office and since then."

The full op-ed is available [here](#).



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish  
Feb 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)  
Feb 18—State Offices Closed—President's Day  
Feb 21—Drop In Legal Services—American Legion Post 17 (1412 9th Ave SW—Watertown (9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 22—Drop in Legal Services—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls (9:00 am—3:00 pm) (CT)  
Feb 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 3—NSIC/Sanford Basketball Championship Military Appreciation Day—Sanford Pentagon—Sioux Falls  
Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC  
Mar 6—VABHHCS Art Show—Building 145—Classroom 108—Ft. Meade—1:00 to 4:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273 (420 Main Street—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Mar 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade—Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 13—VABHHCS Art Show—Hot Springs Domiciliary Auditorium—1:00 to 4:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)  
Apr 6—State MOPH Convention—Rapid City DAV (101 E. Madison Street) - 1:00 pm (MT)  
May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—TREA (1981 Centre Street)—Rapid City—10:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)  
May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion (520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
May 9—SDDVA Mini Conference—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
May 14—Bill Casper's Annual WW II Luncheon—TREA—Rapid City  
May 17—Veterans Honor Concert—State Veterans Home—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)  
May 17-19—DAV Convention—Hilton Garden Inn (5300 S. Grand Circle) —Sioux Falls  
May 27—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)  
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL  
Aug 26-29—SDDVA Benefit School



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South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

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